

What is rubella?

Rubella (German Measles) is a relatively mild, three day illness that seldom leads to complications in children. However, when pregnant women get the disease during their first few months of pregnancy, it can become serious. The rubella virus can cause babies to be born with defects such as cataracts, deafness, heart defects, and mental retardation, or the pregnancy can end in a miscarriage or stillbirth.

What is the difference between rubella (German Measles) and measles (rubeola)?

As stated above, rubella (German Measles) is generally a mild, three day infection that may cause birth deformities in babies born to mothers who are infected with it during pregnancy. Measles (rubeola) is a more serious disease and is sometimes called "hard", "red", or "seven day measles". Individuals infected with measles frequently suffer from ear infections and/or pneumonia.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is usually a mild illness, with a slight fever, swelling of the lymph glands (especially those in the back of the neck), and a rash that lasts for three days. Children may sometimes have no symptoms, but adults may have a low-grade fever, headache, weakness, runny nose, and red eyes. Some people also get temporary swelling and pain in the joints.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 16 to 18 days after exposure, with a range of 14 to 23 days.

How is rubella spread and how long can a person spread the disease?

The rubella virus is found in the noses and throats of infected people. Direct contact with nose/throat secretions or exposure to the cough or sneeze of an infected person can spread the disease.

People infected with rubella are contagious from about one week before the appearance of the rash through 5-7 days after the appearance of the rash.

How is rubella diagnosed?

Rubella is often confused with measles and scarlet fever, so a doctor will need to check for rubella-specific antibodies in a person's blood to be sure the illness is really rubella.

Who is at risk of getting rubella?

Persons who do not receive the rubella vaccine are the most likely to get this disease. Although rubella is most common among children and young adults, people of all ages can develop the disease. Ten percent of young adults may be susceptible to rubella in the United States. Rubella is especially dangerous in women infected during the first few months of pregnancy because the virus can severely damage the unborn

baby.

Is there a test for rubella immunity?

Blood tests are used to measure the amount of rubella antibodies in a person's blood. If a test shows antibodies are present, a person is immune. If no rubella antibodies are present, a person is not protected against rubella.

Is the rubella vaccine safe?

The rubella vaccine has an excellent record for safety. A fever, rash, or swelling of the lymph glands in the neck could happen one to two weeks after getting the rubella vaccine. Mild pain or stiffness in the joints lasting three days may happen one to three weeks after getting the shot. Women known to be pregnant should not receive the vaccine.

How can rubella be prevented?

1. By ensuring that children are immunized at appropriate ages.
2. People with rubella should be separated from non-immune people. This includes exclusion from public settings such as day-care centers, schools, or work for 7 days after onset of rash.
3. Pregnant females who have contact with a person with rubella during their first few months of pregnancy should have their blood tested for infection or immunity, and should be advised accordingly.
4. Susceptible women should be immunized before marriage and advised to delay becoming pregnant for at least three months following immunization.
5. Both male and female health care workers should be immunized against rubella, unless they can provide evidence of immunization or disease.

Where can I get more information?

Your personal doctor, local health department (listed in your telephone directory), or the Virginia Department of Health, Division of Immunization (804) 786-6246 can give you more information.

